

**II. Amendment to the Claims**

This listing and version of the claims replaces all prior listings and versions of the claims.

1. (currently amended) A rectangular siding panel having front and rear faces, and first and second a pair of side faces and top and bottom faces, said panel having a region of increasing thickness thickened portion proximate a top end of said panel extending from said top face to a transition region, said rear face in said region of increasing thickness forming a substantially planar first surface defined from said first side face to said second side face that extends, in substantially continuous planar form, from said top face to said transition region, said rear face having a substantially planar second surface occupying a majority of said rear face defined from said first side face to said second side face that extends, in substantially continuous planar form, from said bottom face to said transition region, wherein said region of increasing thickness and transition region cooperate to permit the substantially planar first surface forming a protruding first area in said rear face having a continuous planar first face extending between the side faces that is shaped to sit substantially flush with a portion of a vertical wall when said siding panel is secured to said vertical wall and angled to overlap at least a portion of a second siding panel secured to said vertical wall with said rear face including a portion of said rear face at proximate to a bottom end of said panel rear face resting upon a front face of said second siding panel, said portion of said rear face proximate to said bottom end having a planar second face extending from said bottom end to near to said first area.
2. (original) The siding panel of claim 1, wherein said siding panel is a clapboard siding panel.

3. (currently amended) The siding panel of claim 1, wherein said siding panel is a fiber cement or wood siding panel.

4. (currently amended) The siding panel of claim 1, wherein said region of increasing thickness first area comprises a reinforced area comprising a mesh, scrim, fabric or panel reinforcement.

5. (canceled)

6. (currently amended) The siding panel of claim 1, wherein said planar first surface has a height of about at least one inch.

7. (currently amended) The siding panel of claim 1, wherein, when said siding panel planar first face sits substantially flush with said portion of said vertical wall when said rear face overlaps said second siding panel, the planar second surface forms a major portion of said rear face forms an angle with said vertical wall of between about 1-10 degrees.

8. (previously presented) The siding panel of claim 4, wherein said siding panel is formed from fiber cement and said reinforcement is embedded within or laminated to said siding panel.

9. (currently amended) A siding panel assembly, comprising:

at least first and second siding panels attached to a vertical wall of a structure, each of said siding panels being a rectangular shaped panel having front and rear faces, first and second and a pair of side faces, and top and bottom faces, said first siding panel angled such that a bottom end of said first siding panel to overlaps a top end at least a portion of said second siding panel, said rear face of at least said first siding panel having a reinforced area proximate to a top end of said rear face forming a sloped, substantially planar first surface defined from said first side face to said second side face that extends, in substantially continuous planar form, from said top face to a transition region and shaped such that at least a portion of said area sits sitting substantially flush with a portion of said vertical wall, said rear face having a substantially planar second surface occupying a majority of said rear face defined from said first side face to said

second side face that extends, in substantially continuous planar form, from said bottom face to said transition region, wherein said siding panels are secured to said vertical wall at least in part by a series of fasteners extending through said respective siding panels and into said vertical wall, wherein at least some of said fasteners are disposed through said ~~reinforced area~~ planar first surface sitting substantially flush with the portion of the vertical wall, wherein said vertical wall provides support for said rear surface against burst fractures from said fasteners.

~~wherein said reinforced area includes a continuous planar first face that contacts said portion of said vertical wall and extends between said side faces.~~

10. (previously presented) The assembly of claim 9, wherein said reinforced area comprises an embedded or laminated mesh, scrim, fabric or panel reinforcement.

11. (original) The assembly of claim 9, wherein said siding panels are fiber cement clapboard siding panels.

12. (currently amended) The assembly of claim 9, wherein said siding panels are installed using a blind nail method using a plurality of nails and ~~at least some of said nails are disposed through said reinforced area.~~

13. (currently amended) The assembly of claim 9, wherein said siding panels are installed using a face nail method using a plurality of nails and ~~at least some of said nails are disposed through said reinforced area.~~

14. (canceled)

15. (currently amended) The assembly of claim 9, wherein said planar first surface has a height of at least about one inch.

16. (currently amended) The assembly of claim 9, wherein said planar first surface slopes extends from a top edge of said first siding panel at an angle that substantially matches an

angle between the planar second surface a major portion of said rear face of said first panel and said wall created by said overlap.

17. (currently amended) A method of installing a siding panel assembly on a vertical wall of a structure, comprising the following steps:

providing at least first and second siding panels, each of said siding panels being a rectangular shaped panel having front and rear faces, first and second and a pair of side faces, and top and bottom faces, said rear face of at least said first siding panel having a first area proximate to a top end of said rear face forming a sloped, substantially planar first surface defined from said first side face to said second side face that extends, in substantially continuous planar form, from said top face to a transition region to sit shaped such that at least a portion of said area sits substantially flush with a portion of said vertical wall when said first siding panel is secured to said wall and angled to overlap at least a portion of said second siding panel, said rear face having a substantially planar second surface occupying a majority of said rear face defined from said first side face to said second side face that extends, in substantially continuous planar form, from said bottom face to said transition region; and

attaching said first and second siding panels to said structure such that a bottom end of said first siding panel overlaps a top end of said second siding panel, wherein said planar first surface sits substantially flush with the vertical wall, the rear face of said first siding panel partially overlaps a front face of said second siding panel with said rear face including a portion proximate to a bottom end of said rear face resting upon a front face of said second siding panel,

wherein said first area includes a continuous planar first face that contacts said portion of said vertical wall and extends between said side faces, and

wherein said attaching step utilizes a face nail attachment method comprising comprises driving a series of fasteners nails through said first siding panel, through said continuous planar first surface and into said vertical wall, and

wherein said vertical wall provides support for said rear surface against fracture during said driving step.

18. (canceled)

19. (previously presented) The method of claim 17, wherein:

said attaching step utilizes a blind nail attachment method.

20. (canceled)

21. (canceled)

22. (original) The method of claim 17, wherein said siding panels are clapboard siding panels.

23. (original) The method of claim 17, wherein said siding panels are fiber cement clapboard siding panels.

24. (currently amended) The method of claim 17, wherein the second planar surface ~~said first area includes a planar face that contacts said portion of said vertical wall and a major portion of said rear face forms an angle with said vertical wall of between about 1-10 degrees.~~

25. (currently amended) A rectangular shaped clapboard siding panel having front and rear faces, first and second side faces and top and bottom faces, said front face being substantially planar, said rear face having a substantially continuous planar first surface defined from said first side face to said second side face sloped with respect to said front face that extends, in substantially continuous planar form, from said top face to a transition region, and a substantially continuous planar second face occupying a majority of said rear face defined from said first side face to said second side face that extends, in substantially continuous planar form, from said bottom face to said transition region, wherein said sloped face is angled such that the substantially continuous planar first face first area proximate to a top end of said rear face

shaped such that at least a portion of said first area sits substantially flush with a portion of a vertical wall when said siding panel is secured to said vertical wall with said substantially continuous planar second face and angled to overlapping at least a portion of a second siding panel secured to said vertical wall, such that said vertical wall provides support for said rear face when fasteners are driven through said clapboard siding panel and into said vertical wall through said first area, wherein said first area comprises an embedded or laminated reinforcement layer.

26. (currently amended) The siding panel of claim 25, wherein said substantially continuous planar second face is angled with respect to said substantially continuous planar first face such that when the substantially continuous planar first face sits first area includes a planar face that is disposed to sit substantially flush with said portion of said vertical wall the substantially continuous planar second face when said rear face overlaps said second siding panel such that a major portion of said rear face forms an angle with said vertical wall of between about 1-10 degrees.

27. (currently amended) A clapboard siding panel having front and rear faces and a longitudinal length defined between first and second side faces, said rear face having a majority first portion forming an oblique angle with respect to a vertical wall when to which said siding panel is affixed to said vertical wall, said rear face of said siding panel also including a second portion substantially continuous planar first surface defined from said first side face to said second side face sloped with respect to said front face that extends, in substantially continuous planar form, from a top end of said siding panel said top face to the majority portion, wherein the first surface is oriented to sit flush which is disposed in substantially continuous flush contact with said vertical wall along said longitudinal length when said siding panel is affixed to said vertical wall, whereby such that said vertical wall provides support for said rear face against burst fractures when fasteners are driven through said clapboard siding panel and into said vertical wall through said second portion first surface, wherein said majority portion forms a substantially continuous planar second surface defined from said first side face to said second side face that extends, in substantially continuous planar form, from the bottom end of said

siding panel to the substantially continuous planar first surface said rear face has bottom and top ends and said first portion forms a planar surface extending from said bottom end to a location proximate to said second portion.

28. (canceled)

29. (previously presented) The clapboard siding panel of claim 27, wherein said clapboard siding panel is a fiber cement siding panel.

30. (previously presented) The siding panel of claim 25, wherein said siding panel is a fiber cement siding panel.